

that I think Republicans and Democrats alike have agreed have soured dramatically.

His testimony, his opening statement, his answers to questions show that he will be a working partner with this institution.

But, obviously, confirming Mr. Blinken is not just about the nominee himself. It is about doing what the American people expect and the Constitution requires—providing advice and consent to ensure that national security officials are in office in a timely manner.

We are facing challenges in every corner of the world. The world is on fire—from Iran to Russia, to Venezuela, to global challenges that define our times and defy borders, like COVID, migration, and climate change. We can't afford delaying to put Mr. Blinken in office. We can't allow the State Department to be rudderless.

If we don't have leadership, we can't be sure that China or Russia and others won't fill the vacuum as they have for the last several years or do something that is adverse to our national and economic security.

Imagine that there is a hostage deal to be had, as I believe there is, and you can't have another country call the Secretary of State because the Secretary of State doesn't exist.

Imagine if there are tensions between two countries that affect our national interests. You don't have a Secretary of State to call as counterpart in those countries to seek to ease the tension, to remove the threat.

Imagine if President Biden needs to have a Secretary of State engage in some part of the world to stop a conflict, to open an opportunity, to prevent an unintended consequence. We don't have that person, and we cannot expect the President to pick up the phone in each and every instance in the world as he is trying to deal with COVID at home and an economic crisis that follows on from that. That is what the Secretary of State does.

So Mr. Blinken also, finally, is not just critical to addressing challenges abroad, we have to acknowledge what the role of Secretary of State is here at home.

If we remember what just happened back on the 6th, three of the first four officials in the line of succession—the Vice President, the Speaker of the House, and the President pro tempore of the Senate—were in the Capitol when domestic terrorists breached the building. Every day we learn more details about this heinous attack, including that the terrorists, some of whom were chanting “Hang Mike Pence!” came within a minute or so of a potential face-to-face encounter with Vice President Pence. Thank God, through the quick thinking and heroics of our Capitol Police and other law enforcement, those three remained unscathed, but if something had happened, it is the Secretary of State who is fourth in line of succession to the President of

the United States. Leaving the office vacant is irresponsible. It is irresponsible in that regard. It is irresponsible in terms of something happening in the world and not having a Secretary of State who could work to deal with it so that we could preserve our national security, promote our national interests, and stop something, an unintended consequence, from happening.

Mr. Blinken has the qualifications. The challenges facing our country call for him to be confirmed, and I hope the Senate does not leave here tomorrow until he is confirmed.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BALDWIN). The senior Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, I would ask unanimous consent that I be recognized for such time as I may consume.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, let me just say to my good friend from New Jersey how wholeheartedly I agree with him. I have known Tony Blinken for a long period of time. I have worked with him in different venues. I talked to him today at some length, and we talked together on many issues that I think are significant.

One issue out there is the one we have been talking about in the Western Sahara. He understands the issues. So I join my friend from New Jersey in encouraging a fast and quick confirmation.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Thank you.

#### TRIBUTE TO TEAM INHOFE

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, we recently said goodbye to a lot of really good, hard-working men and women from the previous administration, and I want to highlight a few of them.

We refer to them—some of my friends and some of my enemies refer to them as the “Inhofe mafia.” It comes from the committees that I have chaired, both the Armed Services Committee as well as the Environment and Public Works Committee. But anyway, they are really a great bunch of people.

I am going to start with Andrew Wheeler. Andrew Wheeler was with me for a number of years—14 years—before he became the Director of the EPA. Here is a guy who was nominated to be the Administrator. At that time, I said that there is no one in America who is as qualified as Andrew Wheeler for this job. The first job he had out of law school was with the EPA. When he was nominated to be Administrator, I kind of gave his whole life history.

All of my Senate colleagues know Andy and have known him for a long period of time—Democrats and Republicans. He has worked for me in the Senate as well as becoming one of my “has-beens,” as we refer to people who used to be with me and are still my good friends.

Andy started in my personal office as chief counsel and went on to serve as

the staff director and chief counsel during my time as chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee. He has decades of experience and is one of the most skilled energy and environmental policy experts I have ever come in contact with, and I am immensely proud of what he has been able to accomplish throughout his career, but particularly as EPA Administrator.

Andy understood that the EPA's mission is to implement the laws that are passed by Congress for the American people. The EPA's job is not to legislate. A lot of people think that. That is our job, to legislate, and then he carries it out, and he did really just a great job with that.

Contrary to what many on the left say Republicans want, we do want clean air and clean water and clean land, and Andy proved that he could accomplish that without burdensome overregulation. During his time at the EPA, he spearheaded a number of the rules and deregulatory actions that brought important relief to American job creators while protecting our environment.

He rolled back the economy standards on cars that were created to try to force Americans to drive vehicles they don't want to drive and that they can't afford. In its replacement, Andy developed the SAFE vehicles rule, which expands consumer choice and lowers the price of vehicles.

Andy also repealed and replaced the waters of the United States rule, or WOTUS. On the WOTUS rule, if you talk to any of the agricultural groups—I am talking about the Farm Bureau and other agricultural groups—they would say that was the rule we really had to do something about. States like mine don't need Washington bureaucrats imposing their radical regulations like WOTUS on people who know the waters better than they do. It is not an overstatement when I say that this was probably the greatest regulatory burden facing Oklahoma's farmers, landowners, and ranchers during the Obama administration. I was proud to see WOTUS repealed by the navigable waters protection rule, which provided a clean and lawful definition of waters of the United States and doesn't try to overregulate the arid parts of the State.

Oklahoma is an arid State. If you go out to the western part of Oklahoma, the panhandle of Oklahoma, it is really arid. If you take that regulation out of the hands of the States and give it to the Federal Government, there is always a concern by our farmers and ranchers in Oklahoma and across the Nation that they would turn these arid areas into wetlands.

Another of the regulatory overhauls accomplished by Andy was for the affordable clean energy or the ACE rule that replaced the illegal Clean Power Plan, which regulated emissions of coal-fired powerplants. I had long been critical of the Clean Power Plan and led the charge against it in the Senate.

Like most of that era of the rules, it was a Federal power grab, and it would have sent Americans' electricity bills soaring, and we all knew that. But we made it history when we repealed and replaced the Clean Power Plan with the ACE rule. It was good. Not only did this rule help Americans' electricity costs be affordable, it is expected to benefit the environment as well.

Just last month, the EPA finalized another big rule that requires EPA to prepare a cost-benefit analysis before coming up with new regulations. How is that at all unreasonable? Americans shake their heads, and they wonder why we would pass things that don't have any kind of a cost-benefit analysis. What is it going to cost? What kind of sacrifices are we going to have to make? Well, we put that into effect, and I think it is something people are very thankful for.

Throughout his tenure, Andy has been focused on what is in the best interests of the taxpayers and not just the Washington bureaucrats. That is clear with this rule and countless others.

You know, one of the good things about Andy, as I already mentioned, is that he knows more about the process than anybody else does—more about the EPA. He has always been a star, and he started at the bottom. When he was first put into that office and was confirmed as EPA director, he gave a speech over at the EPA. He didn't know I was there. I went over there to hear it. He had 300 people at the EPA all listening to him and looking at him and saying: There is room at the top for me. Here is a guy who started at the very bottom and ended up as director of the EPA. It didn't go unnoticed. Everybody realized that.

So I would ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD an E&E News article from July 2018, which details a number of the former staff people and their backgrounds.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[July 6, 2018]

'BRAVE NEW WORLD' AS TEAM INHOFE TAKES OVER

(By Robin Bravender)

It's official: Alumni of the best-known climate skeptic in Congress are leading EPA.

Former aides to Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.) have helped shape President Trump's energy policy agenda since even before he was elected. Many of them quickly landed top spots at EPA and in the White House, and Inhofe alumnus Ryan Jackson helped shepherd Scott Pruitt through the confirmation process before becoming his chief of staff at the agency last year.

But now an ex-Inhofe staffer is taking the reins as Pruitt leaves under a cloud of controversies.

Andrew Wheeler, who steps in as EPA's chief on Monday, was staff director and chief counsel to Inhofe on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee for much of the George W. Bush administration.

Jackson, a longtime friend of Wheeler, is expected to remain as EPA's chief of staff after Pruitt's exit. Jackson—a native Okla-

homan—was an Inhofe aide who worked as EPW staff director and Inhofe's chief of staff.

Brittany Bolen became the acting head of EPA's policy shop after Samantha Dravis left earlier this year. Bolen was Republican counsel to Inhofe on the EPW Committee. Daisy Letendre, a communications adviser in the policy office, was Inhofe's communications director.

And former Inhofe counsel Mandy Gunasekara is now principal deputy assistant administrator in EPA's air office.

Republicans and some energy industry lobbyists say Inhofe's alumni network brings deep policy knowledge to EPA and is well-positioned to bring calm to an agency that has been mired in controversies under Pruitt.

"With these Inhofe staff, you get all of the Pruitt policy and none of the Pruitt baggage," said an energy lobbyist and former congressional staffer.

It makes sense that ex-Inhofe aides would populate EPA under a Republican administration, the lobbyist said, given Inhofe's long tenure as the top Republican on the Senate committee charged with overseeing the agency. "He has hired a lot of smart people to work for him who were good and have gone on to do various other things," the lobbyist said.

Those staffers have a history of working closely with Democrats on Capitol Hill, that person added: "I think that the Democrat staff and members believe that Inhofe and the Inhofe staffers treated them fairly when they were up there."

They also share an appreciation for process, said Matt Dempsey, Inhofe's former communications director.

He expects his former colleagues to take a "back to basics" approach at EPA. "It's not necessarily a political agenda, but it's a policy-based agenda," he said.

That contrasts with how many people viewed Pruitt, who was widely thought to be trying to use EPA as a stepping stool to reach higher political office.

Under Wheeler, "the whole tone is going to be different," the energy lobbyist said. "People are going to perceive that Andy is going to spend his time on policy and not thinking about whether he's the next senator from Oklahoma."

But as Republicans and many in industry are celebrating the rise of the Inhofe crowd at EPA, some on the left are furious that disciples of the Senate's most vocal climate change skeptic—famous for throwing a snowball on the Senate floor to try to disprove global warming—are leading the agency tasked with protecting the environment.

"It is a brave new world of pro-fossil-fuel ideologues who seem not to care about anything but industry profits, the rest of the country be damned," said Bill Snape, an attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity. "We're all getting hit in the head by the snowball at this point. It's obviously disturbing."

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, at the top of the list was my chief of staff, Ryan Jackson. Like Andy, Ryan also went on to be my staff director of the EPW Committee, Environment and Public Works, where he helped negotiate bipartisan bills for highway, water, and infrastructure to environmental bills like TSCA. Remember, that was the one that had the chemical regulations. In his role he helped me negotiate with former California Senator Barbara Boxer.

This is kind of interesting. I think the Presiding Officer would find this to be interesting. Barbara Boxer and I—

for many, many years, every time the Republicans were in the majority, I was the chairman of that committee, and she was the ranking member. Every time the Democrats were in control, she was the chairman, and I was the ranking member. So we worked together, and we accomplished more. I won't divulge where the meeting is, but there is a meeting that Republicans have historically had at 12:15 p.m. on a Tuesday with all the members of the committees, the chairmen. We would talk about what we have done, and when it was my turn, I would say: Now from the committee that actually gets things done. That was Barbara Boxer and I. No two people could be further apart philosophically than Barbara Boxer and I, yet we were able to do that with the help of Ryan Jackson.

I actually hired him when he was still in college. He left my office early 2017 to go to work as Chief of Staff at the EPA, where he was a central player in the implementation of the last administration's policies.

In February, he left the EPA, which was when Mandy Gunasekara took office as chief of staff. Mandy worked for me in the EPW Committee for several years as the majority counsel. In that role she helped me craft air and other policy priorities. While at the EPA, she has been instrumental in advancing priorities like the ACE rule that I mentioned earlier. She is a skilled and devoted public servant, and I am proud of all that she has done to advance policies that benefit all Americans.

A number of others of what I refer to as my "has-beens" have served at the EPA over the last 4 years. Susan Bodine was the chief counsel on EPW and went on to serve as Assistant Administrator in the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance.

Brittany Bolen was counsel for the EPW, Environment and Public Works Committee, and went on to serve as Associate Administrator for the Office of Policy.

Byron Brown was senior counsel at the EPW and went on to serve as Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy.

Then there is Daisy Letendre. She was communications director in my office and went on to serve as a Senior Advisor in the Office of Policy.

So I am proud of all my "has-beens" and the big impact that they have had on our country. We are grateful for their service, past and present—especially that of Andrew Wheeler and Ryan Jackson. I say to our friends Wheeler and Jackson: Thank you and good luck in your next endeavors. You did great work.

Let me just mention one last thing. I urge the Biden administration not to repeal a lot of the rules and regulations and deregulation initiatives that gave us the economy that was unprecedented during the time before the pandemic set in. It would be devastating to our country, which is already trying to recover from the pandemic. Now is not

the time to impose costly new regulations on Americans and the job creators in this country. Everyone knows that this pandemic has wreaked havoc on our economy, and I am certain that, had we not had the virus, we would have broken even more economic records than we already had.

Prior to the pandemic, we had the best economy of our life. We set records, with small business optimism reaching the highest level on record in its 45-year history and unemployment hitting a 50-year low of 3.5 percent. We have always said in the past that full employment is 4 percent. We brought it down that entire year, and in February of 2020 it was down to 3.5 percent. It never had happened before. The median household income rose to a record high in 2019, the highest since 1967. The wealth of American families rose. That is an indicator. It rose to the highest level in history. So these good things were happening, and I would urge this administration not to repeal some of these regulations. Repealing some of these regulations would simply reverse gains like these.

I urge the Biden administration to work with me and others to reach compromises on regulations that would benefit all Americans. That seems to be pretty reasonable, and I think that is a good program to do. Let's give it a try. OK?

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that upon the conclusion of morning business on Friday, January 22, the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination: Calendar No. 1, the nomination of Lloyd Austin to be the Secretary of Defense; further, that there be 10 minutes for debate on the nomination, equally divided in the usual form; that upon the use or yielding back of time, the Senate proceed to vote without intervening action or debate on the nomination; and that, if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### ORDERS FOR FRIDAY, JANUARY 22, 2021

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that when the

Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 10 a.m., Friday, January 22; further, that following the prayer and pledge, the morning hour be deemed expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day, and morning business be closed; finally, that upon conclusion of morning business, the Senate proceed to executive session as provided under the previous order.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, now, for the information of Senators, there will be a rollover vote on confirmation of the Austin nomination to be Secretary of Defense at approximately 10:30 tomorrow.

We also hope to vote on confirmation of the Yellen and Blinken nominations this week.

#### ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 10 A.M. TOMORROW

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that it stand adjourned under the previous order.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 6:14 p.m., adjourned until Friday, January 22, 2021, at 10 a.m.